

Rev. Angelus Forrestal, O.Carm.  
1845-1879  
By Rev. Anthony C. Dressel, O.Carm.

Almost eighty years have passed since the foundation of our province in America, and the stories of some of our men have passed almost entirely into oblivion; However, the coming of the SWORD has aroused some concern about our history. In the short period of six years, almost half of the men on the memorial list have been accounted for, and their biographies are safely recorded. It is now hoped that the histories of the rest of the men will be found and written, and that this strange know-nothingism, which had all but strangled our history, will be totally cured. It is no easy task to describe persons whom you have neither seen nor heard about. However, by gathering a little here and a little there, one can get a fair picture if one is willing to dig and root around in old records, study graves and tombstones, and patiently correspond with persons who might have some data on the man in question— - remembering that only one person in ten will condescend to answer.

The Unknown Soldier of our province is Father Angelus Forrestal. All that our present men know about him is that he died. However, a search of an old cemetery record in Pittsburgh revealed that he was one of a number of young men who felt that he had a vocation to become a missionary in America. He applied to the Carmelites in Ireland for this purpose and, in due time, was sent to the Carmelite Monastery in Transpontina, Italy, where he joined a group of men from other countries who had the same ambition.

In the sixties and seventies the novitiates of several provinces were in distress. America had no novitiate. Accordingly, the General pooled the prospective novices from several provinces into a common novitiate at the Italian monastery. German, Belgian, Italian, and Irish novices were together. It seems to have worked well because that school sent forth very excellent men. This pooling accounts for the fact that men like Father Elias Meyer, Father Lucas Legierse, Father Cyril Feehan, and Father Forrestal all came from the same school and the same class. All were incardinated into our province after the failure of the Commissariate of Kentucky.

John Forrestal was born in 1845 in Terenure, Old Roscommon Diocese, Ireland. His father's name was John; his mother's name, Anna Bowling. His elementary studies were made at home under an old Irish schoolmaster. Part of his higher studies also were made in Ireland. At the age of twenty-two years he reached Rome and, entering the novitiate on August 15, 1867, received the religious name of Angelus. Professed in the same monastery a year later, he was immediately proposed for Minor and Major Orders. He was ordained with Elias Meyer, Joseph Walsh, Cyril Feehan, and Lucas Legierse on May 22, the following year. (This record is from the Roman Curia, signed by the Assistant General, Very Rev. Gabriel Pausback.)

His span of life was short. He died at the age of thirty-four, having been a priest only ten years. When Father Peter Thomas Meagher left Cumberland, Md., in 1870, he opened the Commissariate of Kentucky in Paducah, and founded there the parish of St. Francis de Sales, an Apostolic School for our own men, and the missions in Columbus, Fancy Farms, and Hickman. To this center of Carmelite activity came the new Father Angelus Forrestal. Here he was engaged in teaching and in promoting the mission work allotted to the Fathers. Owing to hardships of all kinds, and also to the ravages of the Yellow Fever epidemic, the Kentucky venture failed in 1881. The fever claimed Rev. Benno Jansen in 1871, Rev. Brocard Murphy in 1873, and left the

foundation helpless. All the missions of the Kentucky Commissariate were ceded back to the Bishop of Louisville on August 1, 1881, it having become impossible to get more men to carry on.

Left in frail health after the epidemic, Father Forrestal was sent north to Pittsburgh in 1876. It was here that he was incardinated into our province and became a member of the Holy Trinity community under the pastorate and priorship of Very Rev. Cyril Knoll. However, his health was totally impaired. His sickness gradually grew worse, and he succumbed to general debility and pneumonia on March 1, 1878.

After solemn funeral services he was buried in the old Mt. Carmel Cemetery on Kirkpatrick Street in Pittsburgh. But not even here was the young missionary destined for final rest. The old cemetery was very small, yet the city insisted on cutting another road through it. In 1887, the late Father Bernard Fink, the pastor of Holy Trinity Church, was forced to buy a new site for a cemetery. This was located in Penn Township, outside of the city, and, although Father Fink was bitterly criticized for accepting and buying this property, the new Mt. Carmel Cemetery is the most beautiful cemetery in Pittsburgh today.

The old cemetery became Entress Brick Yard. A Negro settlement grew up in the district in a short time. Had the old cemetery been kept, as the people insisted, it would, today, be only three small blocks away from the Negro swimming pool, humorously called the Pittsburgh "inkwell." Thus, through the foresightedness of Father Bernard, there is a beautiful Mt. Carmel Cemetery today.

In 1887 the bodies of Father Forrestal and Frater Raymond Hermann were removed to the new cemetery. An appropriate stone marks the grave, but the year of his death is given as 1878 instead of 1879, as shown in the cemetery record. Father Forrestal's story reminds us of those of Father Legierse, Father Joseph Dressel, and Father Paul Nelson. All died young in the priesthood, but undoubtedly each brought a full measure of merit to the Master. St. Therese says beautifully:

The tiny violet proclaims the glory of God as much as the pompous lily. It gives its best and its all to its Maker."

So did Father Angelus Forrestal. The little boy from Terenure who wished to be a missionary in America, became one. He reached his goal, although it was by the way of sickness and trial. The main thing is that he reached it and gave of his best. He reserved nothing and gave what he had during his mortal life on earth. His life was one of perseverance, and of persistent devotion to Mary and the Saviour. Such was the life of many of our good pioneers, those pathfinders who planted the spiritual and temporal seeds whose fruits all Carmelites are enjoying today.